



Tribal Safety and Justice: My Testimony to the Indian Law and Order Commission

Posted by Joe LaPorte, PM-ISE Senior Tribal Advisor on Tuesday, June 19, 2012

Last week, I traveled to Oklahoma City [to testify](#) ^[1] as part of a two-person panel, [Law Enforcement in Indian Country from the Federal Perspective](#) ^[2], before the [Indian Law and Order Commission](#) ^[3]. The Commission is an independent advisory group directed by the [Tribal Law and Order Act](#) ^[4] to report to the White House and the Congress next year with specific proposals to improve safety and justice in Indian Country.

In 2008, [President Obama vowed](#) ^[5] that this administration would, in partnership with Native Americans, empower tribal governments. In response, the office of the PM-ISE uses its government-wide authorities to address a wide range of initiatives to improve tribal government involvement in national information sharing efforts. Indian Country covers an expansive area of the United States. Indian land areas contain nearly 56.2 million acres across 36 states. It has presence at U.S. ports and spans borders. Tribal governments counter threats to homeland security, alongside their federal, state, and local counterparts, every day. The following are several responsible information sharing programs and challenges that I highlighted in [my testimony](#) ^[1].

National Crime Information Center (NCIC)

The FBI's NCIC has been called the lifeline of law enforcement; it is an electronic clearinghouse of crime data that can be tapped into by virtually every criminal justice agency nationwide at any time. In early 2011, a joint action by the U.S. Attorney's Office, DOJ's Office of Tribal Justice, and the office of the PM-ISE removed persistent policy obstacles to ensure tribal access to the NCIC. This access enables law enforcement to securely monitor the movement of personnel and vehicles across jurisdictional lines, including known or suspected terrorists, and improves their safety by helping to keep them informed while performing official duties. However, not all tribal law enforcement entities on the state level have the ability to run arrest warrants.

National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (NLETS)

NLETS is the national justice and public safety information sharing network. It is a state-of-the-art, secure information sharing system for state and local law enforcement agencies. Because tribes are sovereign nations, each tribe interacts with state, local, and federal law enforcement in different ways, and while some tribes have comprehensive law enforcement agencies that can access NLETS through the state-owned systems, others have less sophisticated systems and limited access. Law enforcement information sharing is essential to ensure officers approach vehicles with all the information necessary for a safe traffic stop.

About 1 year ago, the NLETS Program Management Office asked the office of the PM-ISE to assist in

garnering increased NLETS access for tribal law enforcement organizations. We reached out to Indian Country, expanded their knowledge of NLETS benefits, and established the first ever connectivity pilot with four tribes in separate regions of the United States.

The Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI)

NSI is a multifaceted approach designed to increase the effectiveness of state, local, and tribal law enforcement professionals in identifying, analyzing, and sharing appropriate suspicious activities to prevent acts of terrorism. The office of the PM-ISE has partnered with the NSI Program Management Office and the IACP Indian Country Section to develop training materials, and the NSI PMO has sent training material to 172 of the approximately 200 tribal law enforcement agencies thus far.

Fusion Centers

The national network of state and major urban area fusion centers blend relevant law enforcement and intelligence information, and coordinate security measures to reduce threats in local communities. Due to the proximity with tribal lands, tribal law enforcement is a vital participant in the fusion center mission. Through leadership of the office of the PM-ISE, with various state authorities, tribal law enforcement personnel are integrated into four fusion centers, Oklahoma, Arizona, Michigan, and Washington, through liaison programs and embedding analysts.

Moving Forward

The bulk of my office's efforts are focused on addressing foundational policy, governance, relationship, and capacity issues. Generally, gaps remain in tribal information sharing. Geography tends to dictate what to share, and sharing is usually based on relationships. Representation in fusion centers, southern and northern border communication and resources, training, and recognition of tribal law enforcement demand our focus moving forward. [Read the full testimony for more about our efforts moving forward.](#) ^[1]

As I have said before, criminals will always exploit gaps and weaknesses, so we must close them by communicating and collaborating between tribal law enforcement and other federal, state, and local law enforcement organizations. Our criminal is theirs, and theirs is ours.

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[4] <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/07/29/tribal-law-and-order-act-2010-a-step-forward-native-women>

[5] <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/11/30/fulfilling-our-promise-indian-country>

[6] <http://ise.gov/blog/kshemendra-paul/advancing-ise-tribal-nation-partners-and-senior-tribal-advisor-joe-laporte>

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